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Hoogerwerf, Ryan Patrick, "Creating Intercultural Competency: Justification and Design of a Church Leader Intercultural Encounter Workshop" (2018). *Communication Studies Undergraduate Publications, Presentations and Projects*. 89.
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Creating Intercultural Competency:
Justification and Design of a Church Leader Intercultural Encounter Workshop
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Communication Studies Senior Capstone Project

May 2018

Abstract

This paper aims to explore, understand, and put to practice a set of guided questions designed to instill the necessary intercultural communication skills one needs when partaking in some sort of an intercultural interaction within a Christian church mission environment. Through the accumulation and dissection of past literature this paper has created a set of linear questions for church officials to read, understand, and apply to their training prior to and action in mission work across borders. This paper describes and supports a workshop that will allow said church officials to create, improve, and better understand their intercultural competencies, which will, in turn, help them be more efficient in their mission work and will help them get more enjoyment out of the way they are able to interculturally interact.

Creating Intercultural Competency:

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“Mission Work”

Missionaries witness and serve in dramatically different locales and cultures and engage in a range of professions and activities. They are a tangible connection between the church and mission.

These commissioned persons are usually (not always) called to serve outside their country of origin, as pastors, teachers, doctors, nurses (or in other healing ministries), social workers, church planters, evangelists, and in a variety of other ways through various forms of denominational or ecumenical ministries.

There are several paths to mission service through Global Ministries.

Explanation of Mission Work from The United Methodist Church (2018)

“Cultural Diversity”

Cultural differences should not separate us from each other, but rather cultural diversity brings a collective strength that can benefit all of humanity.

Intercultural dialogue is the best guarantee of a more peaceful, just and sustainable world.

Robert Alan (American writer, artist and social activist; 1922-1978)

Introduction

When working across societal borders of any kind, communication's messages and meanings often change. The way one interacts with another can be severely altered due to cultural expectations and differences. Through these alterations concepts and meanings can be completely misconstrued and create tension, hostility, awkwardness, confusion, and many more ineffective byproducts. This study aims to better grasp this process by understanding and using intercultural communication scholarship to evaluate and improve sojourning church officials' understandings of and preparations for interactions with individuals in host countries when they go on mission trips. Three threads of communication scholarship are reviewed here as most relevant to these tasks: intercultural competence, intergroup contact ("the contact hypothesis"), and social identity complexity.

When interacting with others from different cultures it is easy to have trouble communicating. The reason for this difficulty is because intercultural communication is a skill that must be constantly improved and sharpened. It is not something that is meant to sit stagnant. It is something that has to be practiced over and over until you get to a place where you feel comfortable and become successful interacting with others. Intercultural skills should adapt to circumstances encountered in different cultural setting. The best way to do this is to practice different scenarios and actually put oneself in these situations. This study will show and create a set of questions that should be completed before and after either a constructed scenario or a real life intercultural encounter so that the user can accurately assess their interactions and understand what can be done to increase their intercultural competency.

Project Purpose & Justification

The purpose of this study and report is to produce and put into practice a workshop that church officials can use before heading into another country and another culture to participate in mission work. Prior knowledge is used to bring to light the absolute essentials that will help make one's intercultural interactions as efficient as possible. The end of this study includes a workshop that will help church officials heighten their intercultural competency and will allow these officials to prepare for their intercultural interactions in a better way, which will increase the efficiency of their mission work.

The church leader intercultural encounter workshop for creating intercultural competency has been created so that church leaders can feel as ready as possible before traveling across borders to interact with different people from different cultures in a different country. From the research that has been gathered that pertains to this topic, there has been a common theme that has revealed itself; The more contact and experience you have interacting with different cultures in mind, whether it be a simulation or in reality, the more comfortable and efficient your future encounters with other cultures will be (Chien & Atwell, 2017; Kerssen-Griep & Eifler, 2009). There is, however, more than just the interaction piece of learning that helps. According to the uncertainty reduction theory, "individuals seek information when they experience uncertainty, and that uncertainty is reduced with increased communication" (Knapp & Daly, 2011). This insight from Knapp and Daly goes on to discuss a study that proved that individuals, throughout a merger and acquisition process, could reduce their uncertainty through continual, intimate, and positive communication rather than just a one-time interaction. The church leader intercultural encounter workshop, which facilitates the creation and betterment of intercultural competency through research and interaction, was created to help those who are trying to help others. Starting

with a look into the discipline of intercultural skills the following literature breaks down the different themes that were used to give a structure to the workshop.

Review of Literature

Intercultural Skills

Within the realm of intercultural skills there is the concept of intercultural communication competence. This concept measures the ability of someone to interact in effective, appropriate, and successful ways. So, great communicative competence is essential to good intercultural skills.

This, like all of a person's intercultural skills, can be improved through practice and repetition. For instance, the more one is able to dive into intercultural interactions and heighten their abilities the faster their communicative competence will sharpen and the more powerful their intercultural skills will be. Through all of the studies that have contributed to this piece of work, there is one underlying factor; through constant interaction and practice, intercultural skills can improve. However, one can only improve so much, according to researchers Chien and Atwell Seate (2017). With that being said, some aspects of one's intercultural skills will always remain outside the realm of improvement. This means that a person's original feelings toward a culture don't ever fully go away. They can be fine-tuned and shaped over more and more interactions, however, they cannot be suppressed completely. This is important to note because it shows that no matter how hard you try, the prejudices that a person has towards another group of people, or an entire culture can never be fully erased. The most uplifting aspect of this truth, however, is that the fact that we cannot fully diminish these biases, that is okay. It actually is normal to have said biases, it helps us to stay in contact with the roots of our own culture.

Salience is another important quality to have within a group and is something that should constantly be in mind while partaking in intergroup communication. Salience within a group is defined as the state or condition of being prominent (Chien and Atwell Seate, 2017). There are many ways to create this, however, Chien and Seate examined strictly communicatively-induced group salience. Communication-based form of group salience proved to be the most effective way to create a more positive contact effect within the group opposed to other forms of group salience creation. There was an idea that this communicatively-induced group salience brought about by constant communication would bring to the surface intergroup emotions and increase relational closeness. This study discovered through a survey that, in fact, creating communicatively-induced salience by discussing group-related topics within intergroup friendships did increase emotions and closeness within the group. This means that the more group members interact with one another, embrace one another and get to know one another on a more intimate level, the higher the group prominence is.

This study aims to understand how groups of different cultures can function better by first getting to know themselves and each other. The study's focus on relational communication and creating a better relationship while interculturally interacting is integral to the understanding of how to sharpen communication skills in an intercultural setting. Understanding how a group can be more fluid and can be more efficient in their communication and interactions through first establishing a sense of understanding of each other is incredibly important.

Intergroup contact

The intergroup contact theory highlights the idea that interactions with outgroup members, or members that don't belong to a certain group, promote positive outgroup attitudes. (Wojcieszak & Azrout, 2016). In other words, interacting with people that don't belong in a

certain group allows for better cohesion and efficiency within the group when certain conditions are satisfied for that contact. This is essential because it proves that interactions are necessary for any sort of positive intercultural encounter. A positive outcome isn't going to happen strictly by sitting around and not doing anything, no. This theory argues the exact opposite, there must be an interaction with particular features in place, or group members' existing prejudices may even be reinforced rather than diminished through the contact

One way to improve these intercultural skills is to practice them constantly in settings conducive to cross-cultural bias reduction. Conducive settings are settings that are catalysts for intergroup interactions and catalysts for intercultural skill sharpening. Conducive settings can be a number of things, such as group meetings, group projects, one-on-one interactions, and many more situations that allow for all parties participating to dig deeper into one another's culture. Kerssen-Griep and Eifler (2008) tested the effects of an academic mentoring program between novice teachers and students of different cultures on communication. This is a prime example of a setting that is conducive to cross-cultural bias reduction. In this study, the researchers examined the difference, from start to finish, in the White teachers' communication abilities and perspective shift towards African American students. The study spanned over an 8-month period and focused on novice rather than experienced teachers. The results of this study were significant and showed that there was a dramatic increase, over time, in the teachers' ability to interact in intercultural settings. This study shows that throughout a span of constant interaction in an intercultural setting, one's ability to interact with other cultures increase dramatically. So, a constant flow of interaction with groups, whether it be large or small, will increase one's intercultural skills. This, from the same study above, has been shown to be directly impacted by practice. Amidst that constant flow of interaction, there needs to be a common goal between the

parties involved of creating group salience. Hsin-Yi Chien and Anita Atwell Seate showed that if communicatively-induced group salience is created then the results will be more positive contact effect within the group. Striving for this form of group salience will, in turn, increase one's intercultural skills and abilities.

Social Identity Complexity

In any situation where people from two different cultures are interacting with a common goal in mind there might not be many similarities, but there will be some. For instance, when a church leader from America goes to Zimbabwe to help build homes or help build churches, the two parties are from completely different cultures and have to battle that barrier, but they do have the commonality of accomplishing the same task. This is what social identity complexity speaks to. Miller, Brewer, and Arbuckle (2009) conducted three different studies to further understand social identity complexity (SIC). The authors explain that SIC is “represented as a perceived overlap in membership across pairs of ingroups, with lower overlap reflecting higher complexity” (Miller et al., 2009, p. 79). The idea behind SIC is that the more uncertainty one has in an intercultural encounter (low overlap) the higher the complexity, whereas if there is low uncertainty about a person or situation the complexity of that encounter will be severely lower. In this theory, uncertainty pertains to being unsure or uneasy in a particular situation. The more uncomfortable one is in a certain situation the higher the uncertainty, whereas if one is very comfortable in a situation the uncertainty level will decrease. Complexity, in this theory, is measuring how complicated an encounter is in terms of a participant's identity negotiations. This concept, SIC, is pertinent in bicultural beings because of their participation in two cultures. They are going to experience a hefty amount of interactions where they have low overlap in their cultural aesthetic.

The uncertainty reduction theory (URT) supports the SIC theory by detailing why one should reduce uncertainty and how that task would be completed. URT explains that the most effective way to suppress uncertainty and doubt about a certain situation is to gather as much information as you can about the topic, analyze it, and then discuss what was found (Knapp & Daly, 2011). One of the most important aspects of URT is that it isn't just for foreign things, it must also be used to suppress our uncertainties about our own culture.

The church is considered a bicultural environment. The church houses many different cultures while all being lumped into the same Christian culture. There are many interactions that fall under the low overlap umbrella and many interactions that fall under the high overlap umbrella. SIC, provides a better understanding of these interactions and helps deconstruct them. URT will provide a helpful tool to understand the necessity of information gathering and the creation of knowledge surrounding the unfamiliar.

Training Needs Based on Literature

The following assessment of creating intercultural competency brings to the surface three different areas of learning and practice that church leaders would benefit from prior to going on intercultural mission trips. While examining the literature that was used for this study, three training themes emerged. The three training themes are: training to develop a more in-depth cultural understanding of the new cultural destination, training to engage in practice scenarios relating to the new culture, and training for reflection and self-assessment. The next section gives a thorough description of what is in each of these sections within the workshop curriculum. This section will stay strict to the same order that the workshop follows starting with the first theme of gathering information that will help individuals better understand the context they are about to enter, then the claims will move to focus more on a theme of interaction and application, and

lastly, finish with a theme of assessment and growth. The overarching objective throughout this workshop is to sharpen, intensify, and create a better sense of intercultural competency. The workshop's themes are reflected in key questions (see Appendix 1).

Training Objectives for Developing a Cultural Understanding

Information gathering for deeper knowledge of one's own culture. The literature review section of this study shows that partaking in any sort of intercultural interaction is intimidating and can be hard to accomplish without the right tools. However, past literature shows that the way to overcome this piece of adversity is to build a strong foundation of knowledge about the topic (Knapp & Daly, 2011). Once all of the information about a certain context has been learned then most of the uncertainty and doubt surrounding a particular setting will start to fade away.

The first thing that must be done is an assessment and better understanding of one's own culture. This honest understanding of one's home culture will allow for a better understanding of what makes someone act the way that they do and gives more insight into how one should act based on cultural norms.

The objective for this phase of information gathering is for the user to establish a well-developed understanding of who he/she is and what culture they come from. Without this, the idea surrounding one's own culture become foggy and unclear. With this step, the user is forced to clarify their own self before they can try and clarify someone else.

Information gathering for deeper knowledge of foreign culture. Once a good foundation of one's own culture has been established then the user can move into the next step which is to obtain as much information as possible about the foreign culture the user is getting ready to enter. There are many different resources one can use, one of which will be provided for

the user, to find information about another country, from basics to very in-depth reports about a certain culture.

This gathering of knowledge about a culture allows for the removal of most uncertainty. Not all uncertainty will be removed, however, and that is okay. This also allows for users to heighten their research skills and allows for users to discover new ways to learn.

The objective for this phase of information gathering is for the user to eliminate all forms of uncertainty that come with the lack of knowledge about a certain culture. This will help people to dive into another culture before jumping into interacting with said culture which will allow for a new database of knowledge to be created prior to interactions.

Information cross-examination for deeper knowledge of both cultures. Once a knowledge of both cultures, foreign and domestic, has been established there needs to be a review of information to weed out less relevant information. After all the information is broken down and the information that the user feels is most pertinent is extracted there needs to be one final reflection about how the user thinks they are perceived by the foreign culture. Once this step is complete, all of the information gathered thus far needs to be compared against one another. Take all of the information learned about both different cultures and weigh them against each other. This will reveal similarities and differences that will help one to understand what is expected in those particular culture. This is great because not only will it reveal things to know about the foreign culture users are trying to better understand, it will also shine a light into one's native culture and bring to surface things that were unknown or different than the users' prior knowledge.

The objective for this phase of information gathering is to create a general idea of how to think, feel, and behave in a foreign culture based on how that cultures stacks up against one's

home culture. It allows for a comparison between cultures to bring forth similarities and differences that would be beneficial to know before engaging in any sort of intercultural interaction.

Training Objectives for Engaging in Practice Scenarios

Interactive scenarios reflecting both cultures. Once the user feels comfortable about the knowledge he/she has accumulated through the first phase of the workshop (appendix 1), they will begin phase two, which is actually putting that knowledge into a simulation.

The literature review established a common theme of interaction builds confidence (Kerssen-Griep & Eifler, 2008; Chien & Atwell Seate, 2017). This means that in order to build a level of intercultural competency that the user is seeking, they have to practice. It is one thing to know everything about a certain culture, but if it that information cannot be translated into the way an intercultural interaction is handled then all of that information is useless, it simply becomes facts that the user knows.

All of the literature that was studied for this argues that the more interactions one has the more comfortable one is in that particular situation. So, taking this idea and applying it to the specific task at hand, will allow for users to run through simulation after simulation until they feel comfortable and remove as much uncertainty as possible.

The objective for this phase of the information gathering process is to give the user as many opportunities that he/she needs to apply all of the information that was just gathered. It is creating a practice run for them to complete so that they can see what works and what doesn't and what needs more work and what they felt comfortable with.

Training Objectives for Reflection and Self-Assessment

Review of performance. Following phases one and two will come phase three, review and self-assessment. The best way to learn is by applying what one has learned, and then evaluating how the intercultural interaction went. In the workshop (appendix 1) users will be forced to answer self-reflective questions that will allow the user to fully break down what was beneficial and what wasn't from both phase one and phase two (above).

The objective of this phase of the information gaining process is for users to dissect their interactions and research strategies. This will allow users to understand what worked best and what didn't work at all. It will also give a good idea of what the user is already comfortable with and what needs to be worked on more. This is a great tool to truly understand where one stands on the intercultural competency scale.

Opportunity for growth and insight. Finally, after picking apart one's interactions and research processes, the user should take what he/she learned from their own performance and apply it to future performances. This will allow for constant growth and constant evolution of intercultural skills which will, in turn, increase intercultural competency, and will allow for intercultural interactions in the future to be as efficient as possible.

The objective of this phase of the information gaining process is to learn from previous encounters and build on them. After dissecting an encounter, taking and applying what was learned from that encounter will allow for growth in one's intercultural skills. This will allow the user to maximize his/her intercultural competency through self-reflection and assessment.

Applications

The church leader intercultural encounter workshop is to be used as a tool and has been crafted to create a heightened sense of intercultural competency when interacting in a situation

where one might not be completely comfortable. This workshop specifically addresses church leaders traveling across borders into different countries and cultures to participate in mission work. While this workshop was created to be used for cross-border preparation, there are plenty of different cultures in every country, so this workshop can be utilized for those who are interacting with another culture in their home country.

Further Considerations

This workshop is made to ease the interactions between at least two different cultures. However, just because someone lives in a particular part of the world doesn't mean they abide by the dominant culture there. So, this tool wouldn't be of much use in that situation. There is a substantial need for more research to be done in the realm of missionary work and intercultural hurdles one must jump over.

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Appendix 1**Church Leader Intercultural Encounter Guide: Preparation and Reflection Prompts****Pre-encounter prompts*****Information Gathering***

- Where you are going?
 - Why?
- What do you hope to accomplish?
 - Why?
- What do you know about your home culture?
- What of these predeterminations, if any, do you portray?
- What do you already know about your destination and their culture?
- What do you need to know?
- What are you confident in?
- What are you nervous about?
- Visit Hofstede-insights and gather all information you feel necessary.
- Compare destination to country you live in
- Reevaluate what you thought you knew
- Revisit all new information
- Use other resources to help understand
- Unpack perceptions of yourself from foreign culture

Encounter Prompts***Playing out scenarios you have created***

- After building an understanding of your home culture and the culture you plan on visiting it is time to turn that knowledge into action.
- Create scenarios that are unique to your destination.
- Use partners to help you play out these scenarios.
- Make sure to implement all different types of intercultural interactions such as:
 - Scenarios where everything works out well.
 - Scenarios where some things work out, but some other things need to be worked through.
 - Scenarios where everything falls apart.
 - Everything in-between these scenarios, nothing is off limits.

Post-encounter prompts***Reflection and self-analysis***

- Assess how it went (reflection questions)
- What can you improve on?
 - Why does that need improving?
- What felt uncomfortable?
 - Why?
- What did you do well?
- What felt natural?
 - Why?

Conclusion of Appendix

Implementing all of these different steps will assure that the user is completely and entirely ready to enter into an intercultural setting that they aren't fully familiar with at the start of the workshop. It will increase and sharpen one's intercultural skills and heighten one's intercultural competency. This will allow the workshop user the greatest opportunity to be as efficient and effective in this new intercultural role they are entering.

In conclusion, by using the first phase of the workshop the user is creating knowledge about their home culture and the culture they will be going to. The second phase is the acting out of different scenarios to build comfort and experience in different intercultural scenarios. The

third and final phase is the reflection and self-assessment portion that helps to breakdown and learn from all of the activities that just took place.

All three of these steps will lead to a better understanding of intercultural competency and will create a more comfortable environment for any intercultural interactor.